MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning

What We Heard

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I. Chair's message

Change is occurring all around us. A new economy and society are emerging that will depend on innovative, well-educated, skilled and adaptable people with new ideas. Skilled and knowledgeable Albertans, responsive to the global economy, changing markets, new technology and community and social development, are essential to the Alberta Advantage. Lifelong learning is needed to ensure the knowledge, skills, and values are present to continue the Alberta Advantage.

Lifelong learning is an investment in our future and is important to both our personal well-being and our prosperity. Learning begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. Given the constant change underway, we must recognize that learning on a continuing basis is crucial to our future success. This is particularly important for those adult Albertans who are in, or seeking entry into, the workforce.

It is within this context that the MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning was asked to seek the views of stakeholders and other Albertans on strategies to encourage and enable adults to return to learning as a means of improving their employment potential and realizing their career goals.

From Fort McMurray to Medicine Hat and from Edson to Lloydminster, Butch Fischer, Gary Severtson and I traveled across Alberta listening to many stakeholders and Albertans on their ideas, hopes and aspirations for improving their employment potential and realizing their career goals. We heard many, many good ideas on what needs to be done to encourage and enable adults to return to learning in Alberta.

Stakeholders and other Albertans were forthright and innovative in sharing their views. They stressed the importance of the learning system being accessible, affordable, flexible, innovative and responsive to the learning needs of all Albertans. They also noted that there is work to be done to help employers, employees, professional organizations and all other Albertans embrace the importance of lifelong learning and to participate in and promote a lifelong learning culture.

Further, Albertans called for greater collaboration among learning providers and better information on learning opportunities in communities and across the province. They also suggested that measures to promote lifelong learning be community based, whether urban or rural, as those closest to the community are in the best position to assess and meet the needs of members of the community. Throughout the consultations, the Committee heard that new initiatives should take into account the unique needs of learners in rural settings who want to have the same kind of access to learning as those in the larger urban centres.

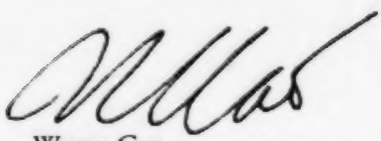
The MLA Committee was impressed by the efforts of the many partners in communities across the province to facilitate lifelong learning. There are always challenges, but communities' commitment and actions toward improving learning opportunities for residents were impressive.

In this "What We Heard" report, we have attempted to reflect what stakeholders and other Albertans told us. We invite you to review and comment on this report. Your feedback will further inform the MLA Committee's final report to the Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Learning.

On behalf of the MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning, I would like to thank all participants for taking the time to share their ideas on lifelong learning. It is through this kind of dialogue that together we can help Albertans achieve their employment potential and career goals.

We would also like to thank the many Community Adult Learning Councils which were instrumental in bringing together the stakeholders and other Albertans in their communities to meet with the MLA Committee.

Together, we can help make lifelong learning a reality in Alberta so that all Albertans can benefit from the opportunities provided by a competitive, knowledge-based economy and enjoy a quality of life second to none.



Wayne Cao
Chair
MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning

II. Introduction

Alberta has an excellent learning system. It provides high quality learning opportunities, excellence in learner achievement, and helps prepare learners for lifelong learning, the world of work and citizenship. There is a strong record of achievement and success. Alberta students rank high in international assessments on academic performance and employability. It is important to continue to strengthen our learning system to anticipate and meet the needs of the future. As the world becomes more knowledge-based, lifelong learning will be key to the continuing prosperity of Alberta and Albertans.

Lifelong learning is about acquiring and applying knowledge and skills throughout life. It's about the ability to keep up, stay fresh, and have up to date skills. Lifelong learning is a process beginning before school and continuing through the primary, secondary, and post-secondary education system. It encompasses the on-going learning acquired throughout life, either for enhancing career opportunities or for general interest and personal development.

Lifelong learning occurs in many settings including schools, post-secondary institutions, and on the job site. It also occurs in community learning facilities, such as community centres or libraries, professional organizations, clubs, and in homes. It involves teachers, professors, instructors, employers, co-workers, mentors, family members, and friends. We must all share in building this lifelong learning community and culture. The Government of Alberta is committed to leading and working with partners to build a globally recognized lifelong learning community that supports Albertans in being responsible, caring, creative, self-reliant, and contributing members of a knowledge-based and prosperous society.

Reflecting this commitment, in June 1999 the Honourable Ralph Klein announced the establishment of the MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning. Mr. Wayne Cao, MLA, Calgary-Fort, was appointed as the Committee's Chair. Mr. Cao was joined by Mr. Butch Fischer, MLA, Wainwright and Mr. Gary Severtson, former MLA Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

The MLA Committee was asked by the Minister of Learning, Dr. Lyle Oberg, to consult with key stakeholders to review the current situation, identify gaps, and make recommendations on ways to help adults return to learning to improve their employment potential and realize their career goals. The Minister is committed to reviewing these recommendations for inclusion in Alberta Learning's future business plans.

III. Consultation process and locations

From Fort McMurray to Medicine Hat and from Edson to Lloydminster, the MLA Committee traveled to over 14 locations across the province seeking the views of stakeholders and other Albertans.

To consult as broadly as possible, the MLA Committee sought the assistance of the Community Adult Learning Councils (CALCs) in Alberta. The CALCs are located in 84 communities across the province. Their mandate is to mobilize resources in their communities to offer coordinated, comprehensive, and meaningful adult learning courses and projects to meet the learning needs of adults.

The CALCs were encouraged to invite all those in their communities involved in adult learning. Although varying slightly from community to community, the following organizations and individuals were invited to meet with the MLA Committee:

- Members of the business community
- Employer associations
- Local libraries
- School boards
- Post-secondary institutions
- Employment organizations
- Community learning providers
- Chambers of Commerce
- Community consortia
- Students
- Employees
- Volunteers

Special meetings were also arranged between the MLA Committee and labour organizations, business organizations, professional associations and individual businesses engaged in employee training. In addition to the input from representatives of Alberta's Aboriginal communities present at some of the consultation sessions, formal Aboriginal input on lifelong learning is being sought as part of Alberta Learning's Native Education Review.

Consultations were held in rural and urban communities across Alberta, including the following 14 locations:

- Fort McMurray
- Peace River
- Wetaskiwin
- Provost
- Red Deer
- Lloydminster
- Edmonton
- Athabasca
- Edson
- Medicine Hat
- Grande Prairie
- Hanna
- Calgary
- Lethbridge

IV. What we asked

Consultation participants were asked to identify strategies to encourage and enable adults to return to learning as a means of improving their employment potential and realizing their career goals. Participants were also invited to share information on learning activities and needs in their communities. In some instances, the MLA Committee held special meetings with students to hear first hand the students' perspective and experiences in pursuing lifelong learning.

In total, over 400 stakeholders and other Albertans came forward to share their ideas and provide suggestions on how to help adults return to learning to improve their employment potential and realize their career goals.

V. What we heard

The MLA Committee heard many suggestions from individuals and from representatives of organizations. The suggestions and views fell largely in the following areas:

- ensure that students in the basic learning system are successful in their learning
- increase opportunities for adult learning
- strengthen community-based learning
- provide more special supports for literacy, English as a Second Language and other special learning needs
- develop a directory of learning programs and supports available to Albertans
- develop better cooperation and collaboration among learning providers
- encourage greater employer support for lifelong learning
- improve standards and certification to better facilitate lifelong learning
- fund lifelong learning
- promote lifelong learning.

These views were not necessarily raised in all locations or by all participants. For example, transportation issues were more often raised in rural communities than in urban communities. These views also partly reflect the community-based mechanism (Community Adult Learning Councils) used in facilitating these consultations. Participants also had varied knowledge and expertise with the learning system. Some participants commented generally, while others offered very specific suggestions for the Committee's consideration. Some of the suggestions, on a range of subjects from the basic learning system – to employer support – to funding for lifelong learning, are summarized in the following pages.

1. The Basic Learning System

Although the consultations focussed on helping adults return to learning, participants noted the importance of the basic learning system for preparing students for lifelong learning.

Stakeholders acknowledged that the basic education system is very good, but they also suggested that more funds are needed, particularly to support smaller class sizes and more specialized student supports, especially in the early grades of 1-3. Additional supports for teachers, and teacher professional development, were also raised.

Participants suggested there should be more counseling services for students. They suggested that students sometimes complete high school not knowing about career options, and some lack basic employability and life skills.

Participants suggested that high school students need a better sense of the expectations of the post-secondary system so they are not overwhelmed on entering this system. Some participants praised

the success of the Registered Apprenticeship Program in this regard in helping learners make the transition from school to work. Participants emphasized that completing grade 12 is critical to further learning and training.

Some participants suggested that the basic learning system must identify what industry wants and focus on the skills needed for work. Others noted that emphasizing what employers want would narrow the focus of learning. They suggested that students need a broad basic education before pursuing a specialization.

Participants noted that schools must cope with issues such as hunger, inadequate housing, problems in a student's home life, and discipline. Some participants suggested that a decision must be made as to the responsibilities of the basic learning system versus those of parents and other community members.

Other comments from stakeholders include the following:

- The system must help students learn "the basics" and guide them how to learn so they can continue learning throughout their lives.
- Schools need to increase efforts to help students learn employability and life skills. (Others said schools can not take responsibility for all these issues.)
- Holistic education, including art, languages and music, is important. Students also need better English skills when they complete grade 12.
- The basic learning system could be more responsive to students who experience challenges in learning. Students should not be passed if they are not meeting acceptable learning outcomes. More testing is needed to assess and respond to learners with learning difficulties.
- More supports are needed to ensure *all* students have successful learning experiences.
- The most important messages to give students are that they should stay in school and go on to some form of further study.

2. Increase Opportunities for Adult Learning

Consultation participants identified the need for more encouragement to pursue lifelong learning. Specific suggestions and comments were made in the following areas:

- Basic Needs and Supports
- Flexible Learning Opportunities
- Special Supports to Encourage Learning
- Government Directions
- Learning Providers

a) Basic Needs and Supports

- Good housing, health and other necessities were identified as essential to successful learning.

- Participants noted that some individuals lack basic employability and life skills. They are not ready for training and need an orientation to learning, a skill or career assessment, or some support to address personal development and life skills. Participants suggested that learners outside of the social assistance program should be supported in receiving this basic training.

b) Flexible Learning Opportunities

- Many learning opportunities are full-time, daytime learning opportunities in an institutional setting in larger centres. This was seen as limiting opportunities for many Albertans to access learning. Participants suggested courses and programs should be offered during the evenings, weekends, and summer months.

- Some expressed concern that rural Albertans do not have the learning opportunities and services available to those living in larger centres. Training infrastructure, transportation, and distance from the learning facility were raised, as was the need for more credit courses and more distance delivery options and technical supports.

- Some employers noted they prefer to train their employees in their own community. More local opportunities for training are needed. Generally, participants also noted the value of more programs which combine training with work experience.

- Participants suggested that more needs to be done by industry, high schools, and communities to promote the trades as a career choice.

- It was noted that learners learn in different ways, and that more learning alternatives should be available. Participants talked about flexible timeframes for course completion, delivery at home or at work, and their interest in more on-line courses and Internet training.

c) Special Supports to Encourage Learning

- Some Albertans lack confidence to return to learning. Participants suggested that an outreach system could be used to encourage potential learners. They also noted that there is value in learning providers continuing to provide non-academic learning opportunities, such as pottery classes, as these are valuable in promoting self-esteem.

- More processes to recognize the credentials of immigrants and other credentials were identified as needed. It is important for learners (immigrants, disabled individuals, and others) to have prior learning recognized and be able to challenge courses by taking a test.

- Childcare, after school care, and daycare services were requested to be available at the facility where courses are offered to allow parents to attend classes and study.

- More adult counseling and guidance services were recommended, as well as more opportunities for upgrading at post-secondary institutions so adults are not going back to the basic learning system.

- Participants suggested the learning needs of seniors should be better considered, such as transportation to classes and the suitability of learning facilities.

- Participants suggested that gaps in Aboriginal programming should be addressed by increasing courses in Aboriginal studies, adjusting course content to reflect Aboriginal beliefs, and training and hiring Aboriginal instructors.

d) Government Directions

- Participants suggested that there is a need to ensure that government program criteria do not discourage the pursuit of learning. Participants suggested that some benefit criteria associated with the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program, Workers' Compensation Board benefits, and the federal Employment Insurance program sometimes discourage learning.

- Participants suggested there is a need for training curricula that is useable by those functioning below a grade 6 literacy and numeracy level. They also suggested that programs such as Youth Connections should be available to all Albertans, not just youth.

- It was noted that lifelong learning will be more work-based and home-based in the future, and government should begin to formulate policies for this.

- Some participants suggested that government should establish province-wide standards for purchasing technology to ensure that the infrastructure and equipment are compatible among learning providers.

e) Learning Providers

- Participants suggested that some institutions might rethink curriculum, teaching styles, and delivery approaches in order to enhance learning in rural communities. A mobile post-secondary learning system was suggested.

- Some individuals suggested that course credits should be more easily transferable from one learning provider to another, whether at the institutional or community level.

- There was support for the Campus Alberta initiative. But it was also suggested that learning providers, especially institutions, should look at a world campus, not just their own campus or Campus Alberta.

- There were views that continuing education could be better coordinated, and that "turf protection" among providers should be minimized to better make programming available in rural communities.

- Some participants noted that institutions have a responsibility to ensure that faculty members have the most current information and the necessary skills instruction. They also proposed that institutions should enhance their supports to help learners identify learning and employment placements and opportunities in the workforce.

3. Community-Based Learning

Participants spoke of the need for more learning opportunities in their communities. Employers spoke of their interest in local training for their employees, rather than have employees travel to Edmonton or Calgary. Some learners told the Committee that they could not afford to go to larger centres for learning. A number of suggestions to help develop community-based learning were proposed:

- Participants encouraged the development of more post-secondary distance programs. They suggested that government should use resources to enhance adult learning in communities instead of in traditional institutions.

- Some participants suggested that learning providers could make better use of expertise in local communities to help deliver college and university learning. This might also allow a better reflection of community priorities in program offerings. There were suggestions to train and hire Aboriginal people as instructors and members on educational boards to help meet the learning needs of their communities.

- There were suggestions to increase the number of and funding for Community Adult Learning Councils across Alberta. This included comments to make better use of all community organizations and facilities, including education councils and consortia, to coordinate, deliver, and promote lifelong learning.

4. Literacy/English as a Second Language

Participants identified literacy training and English as a Second Language as two areas which are key to helping adults return to learning.

a) Literacy

Participants described literacy skills as the foundation without which an adult learner's opportunities for maintaining employment or returning to learning are significantly limited. It was further noted that without literacy, Albertans cannot learn how to use and benefit from information technology resources.

Some literacy support facilitators and tutors noted that they are seeing more people who have literacy and upgrading needs in both rural and urban centres. Participants identified a number of specific suggestions to improve literacy support:

- Some participants suggested making literacy training compulsory and available for workers.
- Many participants commented that literacy should include family literacy. There were comments about immigrant communities also needing literacy support, and that some seniors also need literacy training.
- Some participants suggested increased funding support for literacy programs, coordinators and tutors, and reduced reliance on volunteers. Others encouraged greater use of volunteers.
- There were suggestions for an advertising campaign to remove the stigma associated with literacy training. There were also suggestions to help literacy learners to obtain a high school diploma by developing equivalent programs.

b) English as a Second Language (ESL)

Participants suggested that more opportunities are needed for ESL training to ensure that immigrants can pursue further learning or work in their field of expertise. Specific suggestions include the following:

- Participants suggested that eligibility for ESL training be expanded to include those who may have immigrated to Canada some time ago but who still do not know English.
- Some participants suggested that the federal government should do more to encourage immigrants to learn English before they come to Canada.
- Some participants suggested that ESL programs should include a work experience placement.
- Participants encouraged the greater use of prior learning assessments to acknowledge immigrants' existing skills and abilities, particularly to meet the requirements of professional organizations.

5. Directory of Programs and Supports

Stakeholders suggested there is a need for a comprehensive source of information for learning opportunities and the supports available to learners – a directory for lifelong learning. This directory would include programs and courses offered by institutions and other learning providers, services provided by agencies in each community and across the province, and information on the availability of loans, grants, bursaries and scholarships. It was felt that while much information is available, there is a need for one central source of information. It was also felt that this information could be

used by learning providers to avoid duplication in providing services, potentially freeing up resources to be used more effectively and to facilitate the sharing of resources among learning providers.

6. Cooperation Among Learning Providers

Participants suggested there is a need for greater collaboration among learning providers and other organizations in the community. They told the MLA Committee that communication and partnership in most communities is good, but there could still be better networking to share program ideas and explore ways to transfer learners from one program to another. The Campus Alberta initiative was identified as positive in creating a more seamless, collaborative system of learning that could save learners time and money. A number of suggestions were proposed:

- Participants suggested better use of libraries, schools, community centres, businesses, post-secondary institutions, education consortia, and others as partners, allowing learning to occur in numerous locations at different times. There were suggestions that if one learning provider is not able to offer a program or course, another should be able to do so. Participants also suggested that post-secondary institutions could work more closely with CALCs to deliver courses that are not cost-effective for delivery by the institution.

- Some stakeholders suggested that government should recognize and reward collaboration between institutions and other community organizations.

- There were comments that the government should enhance models which encourage post-secondary institutions to measure prior learning experiences and provide credit to learners who have previous learning and work experiences. There were also suggestions that a single organization be identified and funded to be a one-stop provider where information about learning, including career information, could be obtained.

7. Employer Support for Lifelong Learning

Many participants noted that employer support for lifelong learning is key to enabling adults to return to learning. While recognizing that some employers have practices that support lifelong learning, participants suggested that many employers need to strengthen their commitment and activity in this area. Specific comments and suggestions included the following:

- Some participants suggested that employers need to give employees time off or offer training during work hours for courses and other professional development. There were comments that employers need to especially assist the working poor who cannot afford to pay for external learning or lose pay for missed time at work while taking courses.

- Stakeholders suggested that more opportunities for job-sharing would encourage lifelong learning.

- There were some comments that some employers should ensure better gender equity, have a better understanding of the financial and family challenges faced by their employees, and be more open to hiring the disabled, immigrants and women.

- There were comments that government should develop some incentives (although not wage subsidies) to encourage employers to support lifelong learning in the workplace, especially for smaller employers.

- The government could launch an ad campaign to encourage employers to promote training and use Chambers of Commerce and other employer organizations to encourage employer training.

- There were comments that professional development studies should be a required part of professional certification.

- Stakeholders suggested there should be more university-industry partnerships. There were also comments, however, that the business community should not have influence in determining curriculum.

- Some participants commented that non-profit organizations should be recognized for the training they provide and incentives for non-profit organizations to offer work experience should be offered.

8. Standards/Certification

Participants suggested that Albertans need access to certified courses through learning providers other than post-secondary institutions. They expressed a need for increased formal recognition and eligibility for funding of non-credit courses. They also suggested that there is a need to ensure that all community-based training meets a minimum level of standards. Other participants suggested that Alberta Learning should invest more in outcome measurements to assess the success of learning initiatives. There were also suggestions that Alberta Learning should take the leadership role in establishing common standards for information technology, including the purchase of equipment, and technology-based course content.

9. Funding Lifelong Learning

Participants provided many suggestions on how to better provide funding support for lifelong learning, including funding for learners, special supports, employers and employees, institutions, and information technology. While recognizing that more funding alone is not enough to help adults return to learning, participants stated that adequate, sustainable funding is necessary. They shared the following comments on funding for lifelong learning:

a) Funding for Learners

- Participants noted that employers, employees, learners, and, where applicable, parents should share in both the costs and benefits of learning. If full learning costs were paid for by governments, they noted that the value of learning opportunities might be underappreciated.

- Some stakeholders suggested that learning should be free. Others suggested that continued, subsidized funding for learners should occur if the learner achieves excellence.

- There were comments that applying for a student loan is intimidating. Stakeholders also commented that funding formulas are sometimes confusing and should be streamlined. There is also confusion as to which government department students should approach for pre-employment support and training.

- Some comments were directed at the federal Employment Insurance program, suggesting that the unemployed should be able to take a course while on Employment Insurance without having their benefits cut off.

- Some participants suggested that the eligibility criteria for student loans could be changed. They commented that some potential learners are denied student loans because their spouses earn too much money when that money may be going to support their family or to put other family members through college or university. Participants suggested that more student support should be available for the working poor or those who need upgrading to enter training and other learning programs.

- The student funding system requirement that the learner have some savings before he/she can apply for a loan was of concern to stakeholders. In addition, the bridging period between the last loan or grant payment and finding a summer job is sometimes difficult.

- Stakeholders noted that rising tuition is a concern. They suggested that student loan amounts should be more frequently raised to better reflect increasing costs for tuition, rent, books, and computers. They also commented that government should raise the amount a student can earn on a monthly basis without reducing the student loan, and that scholarships should not result in a reduced student loan.

- Some stakeholders commented that learning costs for rural students are often higher than for urban students because rural students must pay for accommodation and transportation to and from rural communities. They expressed concern with the student loan requirement that students cannot have a vehicle beyond a certain value.

- Some stakeholders commented that scholarships and bursaries go to higher achievers, leaving average learners to pay more for their education. They viewed bursaries as more helpful because they help more learners. While noting that grants are also available, they claim that many people don't know about them.

- Some participants suggested that government should provide more tax credits for education. In particular, it was noted that older learners do not want to incur more debt and will avoid further learning if more debt is involved.

- There were comments that more part-time and other learners should be able to access student loans, grants, and bursaries, and that more part-time studies/courses should be tax deductible to encourage learning and defray costs. There were also comments that learners should not be ineligible for loans based on the duration of a course. The emphasis should be on getting the learner through the course and on to further learning or to work.

b) Funding for Special Supports

- Some participants suggested that government must provide more funding for literacy programs, for low-income parents who need daycare while training, and for seniors who wish to pursue lifelong learning. They also suggested that any barriers to learning in existing Alberta government programs should be removed (such as low earnings exemptions).

c) Employer and Employee Responsibilities and Incentives

- Some participants suggested that there should be employer tax credits to develop or offer training programs, or measures to acknowledge employer contributions to the local community.

- Stakeholders noted that individual learners need to make setting aside money for learning a priority. They suggested that additional tax credits should be developed to assist learners in saving for learning, such as an adult registered education savings plan. They also commented that the Alberta Government should urge Revenue Canada to not treat employer-supported training as a taxable benefit for the learner.

d) Funding for Institutions and Other Learning Providers

- Several participants commented that government cutbacks over the past few years have led to inadequate funding for institutions and communities for learning. There were also concerns regarding funding for infrastructure as enrollments increase. It was noted that the Minister of Learning had launched a separate MLA enquiry into institutional funding.

- Stakeholders suggested that funding institutions on a per student basis discourages them from collaborating.

- There were comments that there needs to be a recognition of the costs borne by institutions for prior learning assessments. These costs should be taken into account in funding support through performance envelopes.

- Some stakeholders suggested that institutions and community organizations have suffered from the federal and provincial merging of labour market services. They noted that institutions and community organizations are now asked to fund a course and recover the costs from students. Some learning providers are not willing to take the risk of launching a course without knowing if they will recover their costs.

- Some participants suggested there should be additional funding for CALCs, and that they should be able to access grants for technology and other supports in the same manner available to post-secondary institutions. There were also comments about the amount of time spent researching and writing proposals for funding.

- Some stakeholders expressed concern that funding formulas for rural communities should be different than those for larger centers, since the cost per learner in rural communities may be higher. They also suggested that basic education student distance and sparsity grants should also be available for adult education.

e) Information Technology

Many participants spoke of the increased learning opportunities afforded by information technology and of the high expense required to ensure the technology supports are in place. Others, however, warned that technology is a tool used to assist in learning and should not be seen as an end in itself. They also noted that because people learn differently, technology-based learning is not for everyone and classroom-based learning should not be devalued. Comments and suggestions on funding for information technology include the following:

- Participants noted that connectivity to networks is expensive and many learning facilities cannot afford to have extensive hook up charges. Some noted that the intent to ensure conventional bandwidth access to all schools is of concern when other forms of Internet access may be more efficient, such as the use of satellites.

- Stakeholders suggested that there should be a provincial plan for technology, involving the government, learning providers, and telecommunications companies. It was noted that while some education providers have the necessary information technology support, it may not be compatible with technology purchased by other learning providers. Guidelines for interfacing with technology are needed so that all those using technology can be connected.

- There were some concerns that, when funding for acquiring information technology is provided, it often does not include the operational support. There were also concerns that growth in distance learning must be accompanied by increased support for technology.

- The key performance indicators system for post-secondary learning requires allocation of limited institutional resources to find requested data. These limited resources could be more effectively used by adopting a simplified reporting system.

10. Promoting Lifelong Learning

Consultation participants agreed with the importance of lifelong learning. They want learners, learning providers, employers, workers, parents, governments, and communities to embrace lifelong learning, to work together to break down the impediments to learning, and to plan for future lifelong learning. Participants noted that there is a change in the economic environment that requires not only a focus on getting people back in the workforce, but also on continuous learning once they are there. They further noted that the first three years of life and the senior years are important times for learning and that there are many retired people waiting for the opportunity to help others. Suggestions for promoting lifelong learning include:

- Communications initiatives such as a province–wide ad campaign should be used to promote lifelong learning.

- Greater acknowledgement that all types of learning are valuable, whether they are life skill courses, post-secondary degrees, or certificates.

- A registry of retired mentors should be established to provide opportunities for a mentor to talk to a discouraged learner about similar experiences and be an encouragement toward the pursuit of lifelong learning.

- There should be measurement and evaluation of the effectiveness of efforts to promote lifelong learning.

VII. Conclusion and next steps

Albertans must be ready for the future. They must have the education, skills, and knowledge to take advantage of the new knowledge-based economy, and this means there must be a commitment to lifelong learning. Whether this learning occurs in the workplace, a school environment, a post-secondary institution, a community centre, or at home, it is essential that Albertans embrace continuous learning. The MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning was pleased to hear that Albertans are ready to make this commitment, and that they have suggestions – outlined in this report – for how to make lifelong learning a reality for all Albertans.

The MLA Committee has attempted to capture the excellent information and suggestions provided by stakeholders and other Albertans in this report. The Committee also supplemented its consultations with one-on-one meetings with members of the business community. The Committee is now beginning work to prepare a final report with recommendations for consideration by the Minister of Learning. The final report will also be shared with the Standing Policy Committee on Learning and Employment. This final report will be considered as input in Alberta Learning's business plan development.